

Unlocking Leadership in Young Children: Insights from Teachers, Parents, and Administrators

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Abstract

Leadership is crucial for success and should be nurtured from an early age. As society rapidly evolves, traditional notions of leadership must adapt to remain relevant. This study aims to identify and prioritize leadership characteristics and skills that parents and teachers consider most in need of development and to investigate approaches for promoting leadership in early childhood through the perspectives of teachers, parents, and administrators. The research included 440 participants—teachers, parents, and administrators from kindergartens under the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC) in Bangkok—using stratified random sampling. The perceived needs data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and the Modified Priority Needs Index. Single survey questions were assessed through frequency, percentages, averages, and standard deviation. Findings show that both parents and teachers consider communication the most important skill to develop. However, parents prioritize responsibility but often overlook collaboration, while teachers emphasize decision-making and underemphasize responsibility. Parents most frequently develop leadership by praising desirable behavior but least frequently involve children in planning activities to achieve goals. Teachers use positive communication strategies but least frequently encourage children to resolve conflicts independently or assess their own and peers' learning. Administrators focus on creating learning experiences and fostering a school environment that promotes leadership in children, but least frequently reward teachers who excel in this area or encourage collaboration with parents and external organizations. These insights can guide the development of targeted activities and help create tailored leadership strategies that align with the needs and priorities of each group to foster leadership in young children.

Keywords: early childhood education, educational strategies, leadership development, parent-teacher collaboration

1. Introduction

Leadership and social influence are expected to stay among the most important skills needed for 2030, according to insights from over 1,000 top global companies (World Economic Forum, 2025). These specialized skills are essential for the jobs of the future and are in high demand across multiple emerging professions. As one of the most dominant skills, leadership skills play a preeminent role during the critical time of uncertainty and changes (Laygo-Saguil, 2021), enabling the individual to master himself as well as leading others to success.

Leadership is a developmental process that is inherently multi-faceted and evolves over time, emphasizing the importance of cultivating leadership skills from an early age (Mawson, 2011; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Barthold, 2014; Daly et al., 2015; Zaccaro et al., 2018; Reitan & Stenberg, 2019; Hailey & Fazio-Brunson, 2020; Laygo-Saguil, 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Early experiences of young children provide the foundation for the development of future leadership skills (Dicarlo et al., 2024). Moreover, leadership skills are best developed in childhood, as children can learn them naturally, without pressure or the need to overcome themselves (Abdigapbarova et al., 2016). Many studies also suggest that leadership potential exists in every child and can be enhanced through education and practice (Bisland, 2004; Shin et al. 2004; Zembat et al., 2017; Ruoran et al., 2023).

However, what defined leadership in the past may no longer be relevant in today's ever-changing world, as leadership characteristics and skills must adapt to these constant changes while enabling individuals to thrive in society. Individuals who possess these characteristics and skills are more likely to exhibit appropriate behaviors and demonstrate the potential for developing effective leadership abilities (DeRue et al., 2011). These characteristics form the foundation for the development and growth of more specific leadership abilities (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Moreover, cultural identity plays a significant role in shaping the development of leadership identity (Arminio et al., 2000). Collectivistic individuals in an individualistic society may recognize a mismatch between their developmental experiences, which could manifest as shared leadership in a group and society's expectations for individualistic leaders (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Each context and culture holds unique values and perspectives on leadership. Therefore, studying leadership characteristics and skills is crucial to identifying the forms of leadership in young children that are most suitable for the current era (Gordon & Yukl, 2004).

While leadership concepts may vary across cultures, certain universal characteristics and skills serve as key indicators of effective leadership. These include confidence (Barthold, 2014; Fox et al., 2015; Morin, 2015; Rauduvaite, 2015; Abdigapbarova et al., 2016; Penn State Extension, 2016; Hailey & Fazio-Brunson, 2020), decision-making (Wilai, 2014; Rauduvaite, 2015; Fox et al., 2015; Daly et al., 2015; Penn State Extension, 2016; Zembat et al., 2017; Zaccaro et al., 2018; Brummelman et al., 2021; Laygo-Saguil, 2021; Dicarolo et al., 2024), empathy (Wilai, 2014; Fox et al., 2015; Morin, 2015; Hailey & Fazio-Brunson, 2020; Laygo-Saguil, 2021; Chen, 2023), responsibility (Rauduvaite, 2015; Fox et al., 2015; Penn State Extension, 2016; Laygo-Saguil, 2021; Dicarolo et al., 2024), communication (Barthold, 2014; Wilai, 2014; Rauduvaite, 2015; Fox et al., 2015; Abdigapbarova et al., 2016; Zembat et al., 2017; Zaccaro et al., 2018; Hailey & Fazio-Brunson, 2020; Laygo-Saguil, 2021; Chen, 2023; Dicarolo et al., 2024), and collaboration (Wilai, 2014; Rauduvaite, 2015; Abdigapbarova et al., 2016; Penn State Extension, 2016; Zembat et al., 2017; Dicarolo et al., 2024).

It is worth exploring whether Thailand, as a collectivist culture, shares similar perspectives on these leadership characteristics and skills, although their perception and emphasis may differ. In Thailand, research on leadership in young children remains scarce. However, a report from World Bank Group (2024) highlighted that Thailand faces a significant skills crisis, with many children, youths, and adults lacking essential socio-emotional skills, including leadership—a persistent challenge for the country. Thailand's cultural values, which emphasize humility, politeness, and obedience, can sometimes discourage Thai children from developing leadership characteristics and skills at an early age, encouraging them to follow rather than take the lead (Chayakonvikom et al., 2016). This often results in a lack of confidence, susceptibility to social trends, and a loss of individuality. Additionally, without leadership development, Thai children may struggle to assert themselves or advocate for others, leading to diminished social responsibility and care for their community (Zhang, 2023).

Many researchers agree that play can effectively develop leadership in young children (Mawson, 2009; Kark, 2011; Barthold, 2014; Liu et al., 2021). Play reflects children's perception, thoughts, and understanding of the world around them. Children acquire knowledge about the things or activities they engage in through observation, sensory exploration, hands-on practice, trial and error, and guidance from others. Moreover, play contributes significantly to the development of leadership identities, as well as decision-making and interpersonal skills, which are key characteristics of effective leaders (Kark, 2011). Play provides an ideal environment for preschoolers to naturally exhibit and practice leadership behaviors (Liu et al., 2021), particularly in social or cooperative play. Engaging in social play enables children to understand different perspectives, strengthening their ability to take on different viewpoints and fostering empathy (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). These skills, in turn, contribute to moral development and lay the foundation for ethical leadership later in life (Liu et al., 2021). For learning groups to be an effective teaching method, teachers must create an environment that emphasizes mastery-oriented goals (Yamaguchi, 2001). Consequently, parents and teachers can support leadership development in young children by engaging them in play that centers on collaborative tasks. Parents can emotionally support their children by fostering self-confidence and an achievement-oriented mindset, acting as role models, and encouraging participation in various activities (Reitan & Stenberg, 2019). Similarly, teachers can foster children's confidence in leadership by providing opportunities and engaging them in programs and activities that promote personal and leadership growth (Laygo-Saguil, 2021).

The responsibility rests with all institutions, particularly families and schools, to advance and enhance society by intentionally fostering leadership skills in young children (Bisland, 2004; Gottfried et al., 2011). Administrators should create opportunities for collaboration between teachers and parents. This perspective aligns with Liu et al., (2021) who asserted that children at this stage rely on external influences, such as parents, teachers, and authority figures, to provide them with opportunities for developing leadership skills. The family system serves as the foundation for leadership development during early childhood and adolescence (Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Liu et

al., 2021), with children often associating ideal leadership characteristics with those of their parents (Magomaeva, 2013). Therefore, it is logical that the key figures in young children's lives collaborate to foster these essential characteristics and leadership skills.

In conclusion, leadership is of utmost importance in today's diverse and rapidly changing society. People must be able to lead themselves and live harmoniously with others. Leadership development should begin in early childhood, as it is a stage where children can quickly absorb new things and are highly capable of development. The development of leadership in early childhood requires collaboration from all parties, particularly those closest to the child such as teachers and parents. Educational institutions should support leadership programs that focus on individual child development and encourage continuous learning between home and school. High-quality leadership programs can foster leadership skills and positively impact lifelong leadership development (Gialamas et al., 2020). The researcher sees the necessity of fostering leadership from the early childhood stage, as it is the period with the greatest potential for leadership development. Based on research on leadership characteristics and skills valued in both individualistic and collectivist contexts, it is intriguing to explore how Thailand, as a collectivist society, perceives these leadership characteristics and skills in young children and to understand how key stakeholders—teachers, parents, and administrators—actively contribute to fostering leadership in young children. As one of the pioneers in exploring leadership in young children in Thailand, this study aimed to provide researchers and educators with a deeper understanding of leadership in young children from the lens of parents, teachers, and administrators. Additionally, the study sought to contribute to the literature on ways those stakeholders can enhance leadership characteristics and skills in young Thai children. Therefore, the purposes of this study are to identify and prioritize the leadership characteristics and skills that parents and teachers consider most in need of development and to investigate approaches for promoting leadership in early childhood through the perspectives of teachers, parents, and administrators.

2. Method

2.1 The Participants

The samples were calculated using Taro Yamane's sample size table, with a 95% confidence level, from a population of 130,982, which included 12,834 teachers working in kindergartens regulated by the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC), 114,588 children enrolled in these kindergartens, and 3,560 OPEC-affiliated kindergartens. A total of 420 samples were determined which included 200 teachers, 200 parents, and 20 administrators from OPEC-affiliated kindergartens. To obtain these samples, the kindergartens under OPEC were selected using a stratified random sampling method according to geographic location in Bangkok to ensure proportional representation from each region.

To ensure the required number of samples was collected, 10% more questionnaires were distributed than originally calculated. A total of 440 were completed and returned, contributing to a 95% overall return rate, with participant rates for each group ranging from 80% to 98%. The researcher then verified the completeness and quantity of the returned questionnaires to confirm they were accurate, complete, and suitable for analysis.

2.2 The Instruments

Three separate questionnaires were used to collect data from three groups of participants: parents, teachers, and administrators. Each questionnaire contained 69, 72, and 30 items, respectively. The majority of these items were dual-response questions using a 5-point Likert-like scale, ranging from "a very small extent" to "a very great extent". Other questions were single-response items that asked for factual information, such as demographic details and the approaches currently used to promote leadership in young children.

Each questionnaire was reviewed for content validity by three external professionals. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) for all questionnaires was 0.99, which is above the acceptable threshold of 0.5, indicating high content validity (Thompson, 2003). The internal reliability of the entire questionnaire and its components was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's Alpha values for the questions related to leadership characteristics and skills, prioritized based on the needs of parents and teachers, ranged from 0.96 to 0.98. Similarly, the Cronbach's Alpha values for the current approaches used by parents, teachers, and administrators to promote leadership in young children ranged from 0.90 to 0.98. These results demonstrate a high level of internal consistency, confirming that all components of each questionnaire are reliable and suitable for further use.

2.3 Data Collection

The researcher followed several steps to collect data: first, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (COA67/031, dated 27 May 2024) was obtained from Kasetsart University. Next, formal request letters were sent to seven kindergartens under OPEC. The researcher then provided the administrators of each kindergarten with details of

the research project. Following this, questionnaires, consent forms, and information letters outlining the research purpose and data collection methods were distributed to administrators, teachers, and parents. To ensure privacy, participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during data collection, analysis, and reporting. Finally, the researcher collected the completed questionnaires and consent forms from all participants.

2.5 Data Analysis

The discrepancy model was used to assess leadership development needs in young children, based on the perspectives of parents and teachers. This model identifies the gap between the current leadership characteristics and skills observed in children and the desired characteristics and skills as viewed by both parties.

The perceived needs data, collected using a dual-response format questionnaire, were analyzed by calculating the mean and standard deviation. The priorities were then ranked using the Modified Priority Needs Index method which was calculated by

$$\text{Modified Priority Needs Index (PNI}_{\text{Modified}}) = (I-D) / D \quad I = \text{Current state, } D = \text{Desired state}$$

The Modified Priority Needs Index was employed to rank and identify the most pressing needs, with the top ten items considered urgent. This method is commonly used in surveys to prioritize needs based on their importance (Wongwanich, 2019). Single-response survey questions were analyzed using frequency, percentage values, as well as averages and standard deviations.

3. Results

The results are presented in two sections: 1) leadership characteristics and skills prioritized based on parents' and teachers' needs, and 2) the current approaches employed by parents, teachers, and administrators to promote leadership in young children. The profiles of each group are as follows.

Parents The majority of the 215 parents are female (79%), with the largest age groups being between 36-40 years old (38%) and 41-45 years old (31%). Most parents live with their partners (92%). A significant portion has a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent (55%). Their occupations vary, with 33% being business owners, 30% working in office jobs, and 11% being housewives. Most respondents are mothers (76%), have only one child (76%), and have 5 to 10 years of experience raising children (55%).

Teachers Out of the 205 kindergarten teachers, the majority are female (99%), with the largest age groups being between 25 and 30 years old (20%) and over 50 years old (19%). Most teachers hold a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent (88%), with 43% specializing in Early Childhood Education. A significant number of teachers have taught for less than 5 years (26%) or more than 20 years (23%). Additionally, the majority have never attended leadership courses (54%).

Administrators The majority of the 20 administrators are female (89%), aged between 41 and 50 (42%). Most administrators hold a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent (52%), with 32% specializing in Early Childhood Education. A significant number have management experience ranging from less than 5 years (21%), 5 to 10 years (21%), and 16 to 20 years (21%). Over half of them have never taken leadership courses (53%).

3.1 Part One: Leadership Characteristics and Skills Prioritized Based on Parents' and Teachers' Needs

3.1.1 Leadership Characteristics and Skills Prioritized Based on Parents' Needs

The result of PNI_{modified} (Table 1) shows that parents ranked communication as the most important leadership component in young children. The behavior that represents effective leadership communication is listening to others without interrupting (0.33). However, responsibility was selected four times in the top ten ranking. The behaviors that demonstrate responsibility include accepting what one has done without blaming others (0.31), using natural resources efficiently for maximum benefit (0.30), controlling oneself to complete one's tasks successfully (0.27), and explaining the reasons and consequences of actions on others and the environment (0.21). Both decision-making and confidence appeared twice. The only behavior indicating empathy is listening to the needs, feelings, and opinions of others (0.23). Notably, collaboration did not appear in the top ten leadership characteristics and skills ranked by parents.

Table 1. Leadership Characteristics and Skills Ranked by PNI_{modified} (Parents)

Rank	Leadership Components	Leadership Behavioral Indicators	Current State		Desired State		PNI mod
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	Communication	Listen to others without interrupting.	3.30	0.87	4.39	0.73	0.33
2	Responsibility	Accept what one has done	3.42	0.84	4.48	0.69	0.31

		without blaming others.					
3	Responsibility	Use natural resources efficiently for maximum benefit.	3.35	0.87	4.37	0.73	0.30
4	Responsibility	Control oneself to complete one's tasks successfully.	3.52	0.85	4.46	0.74	0.27
5	Decision-making	Compare the advantages and disadvantages of the available options.	3.40	0.87	4.27	0.71	0.25
6	Decision-making	Anticipate the situation and the possible outcomes that may occur.	3.38	0.77	4.23	0.71	0.25
7	Empathy	Listen to the needs, feelings, and opinions of others.	3.52	0.89	4.34	0.73	0.23
8	Confidence	Speak and express themselves confidently in front of others.	3.69	1.00	4.53	0.67	0.23
9	Confidence	Recognize their strengths and acknowledge areas for improvement.	3.65	0.80	4.42	0.66	0.21
10	Responsibility	Explain the reasons and consequences of actions on others and the environment.	3.59	0.84	4.35	0.73	0.21

3.1.2 Leadership Characteristics and Skills Prioritized Based on Teachers' Needs

According to the PNI_{modified} ranking by teachers (Table 2), the top leadership characteristic and skill is communication. Similar to the parents' ranking, the behavior reflecting communication is listening to others without interrupting (0.27). Decision-making is also highly prioritized in the teachers' ranking, with five decision-making behaviors appearing in the top ten. These behaviors include setting personal and group goals (0.24), adapting methods when facing obstacles and appropriately using available resources (0.24), comparing the advantages and disadvantages of available options (0.24), anticipating potential situations and outcomes (0.22), and creatively setting choices, methods, and materials to achieve goals (0.21). Confidence, empathy, and collaboration each appear once in the top ten rankings. Interestingly, the teachers' ranking did not include any behaviors that indicated responsibility.

Table 2. Leadership Characteristics and Skills Ranked by PNI_{modified} (Teachers)

Rank	Leadership Components	Leadership Indicators	Current State		Desired State		PNI mod
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	Communication	Listen to others without interrupting.	3.54	0.96	4.48	0.67	0.27
2	Decision-making	Set their own goals and the goals of the group.	3.48	0.84	4.31	0.69	0.24
3	Decision-making	Adapt methods to overcome obstacles and effectively use available resources.	3.45	0.85	4.27	0.77	0.24
4	Decision-making	Compare the advantages and disadvantages of the available options.	3.44	0.89	4.26	0.76	0.24
5	Decision-making	Anticipate the situation and the possible outcomes that may occur.	3.48	0.85	4.25	0.71	0.22
6	Confidence	Recognize their strengths and acknowledge areas for improvement.	3.55	0.87	4.33	0.68	0.22
7	Communication	Persuade, influence, and negotiate with others politely and gently to achieve their goals.	3.66	0.82	4.43	0.66	0.21
8	Decision-making	Creatively select choices, methods, and materials to achieve goals.	3.55	0.87	4.29	0.71	0.21
9	Empathy	Tell the differences between emotions, feelings, desires, and thoughts of oneself and others.	3.57	0.84	4.31	0.70	0.21
10	Collaboration	Manage conflicts during group play with friends in a non-violent manner.	3.67	0.82	4.41	0.70	0.20

3.2 Part Two: The Current Approaches Employed by Parents, Teachers, and Administrators to Promote Leadership in Young Children

3.2.1 Approaches Employed by Parents

The survey results revealed that children mostly play at home with their parents, including both fathers and mothers (75%). Most parents engage in activities with their children such as reading books (81%), building blocks (72%), role-playing (70%), watching TV (56%), playing with water (48%), and playing with sand (30%). The majority of families play with their children daily (76%) and typically spend 30-40 minutes per day on these activities (58%). Additionally, most families (95%) believe that children should begin developing leadership from a young age.

Parents' most frequent practice to promote leadership in young children during play is praising children when they exhibit desirable behavior ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 0.48$). In contrast, the least frequent practice is planning play activities with children to achieve the desired goals ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.74$). Parents are most involved with schools by completing activities assigned by teachers to do with their children at home ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.60$). However, engaging in activities at home specifically to promote leadership characteristics and skills is less common ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.70$).

3.2.2 Approaches Employed by Teachers

According to Table 3, the findings reveal that designing activities that promote collaboration in groups of 2-3 children is the most frequent practice teachers engage in during activity planning ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.74$), it remains relatively less frequent compared to practices in other domains. In the introduction stage, practices appear remarkably strong overall. The most frequent activity is greeting every child warmly to make them feel welcomed and secure ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.68$). Conversely, creating an engaging and stimulating classroom environment and atmosphere is the least frequent practice during this stage ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.72$), though it remains higher than the most frequent practices in other phases. During the learning stage of the experience provision phase, teacher practices vary. Praising children when they display desirable behavior is the most frequent activity ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.73$). Conversely, encouraging children to resolve conflicts independently during group activities is the least common practice ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.90$). Similarly, in the conclusion phase, the least frequent practice is encouraging children to assess their learning process as well as that of their peers ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.84$). Regarding parent involvement, the most common practice is consulting with parents to identify solutions and support the child's development ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.74$). However, assigning activities for parents to do with their children at home is the least frequent practice in this domain ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.89$).

Table 3. Approaches to Promote Leadership in Young Children by Teachers

Areas	Approaches to promote leadership in young children by teachers	Mean	SD
Activity planning	Set indicators, learning objectives, or learning outcomes that promote leadership characteristics and skills	4.04	0.73
	Plan activities that align with indicators, learning objectives, and outcomes	4.12	0.75
	Design activities that promote collaboration in groups of 2-3 children.	4.18	0.74
Experience provision (Introduction)	Create an engaging and stimulating classroom environment and atmosphere.	4.36	0.72
	Greet every child warmly to make them feel welcomed and secure.	4.49	0.68
	Engage children's interest through questioning, storytelling, and singing.	4.46	0.67
	Review children's prior experiences before starting the activity.	4.40	0.69
Experience provision (Learning)	Encourage children to collaboratively plan the activity.	4.06	0.80
	Encourage children to assign tasks and divide responsibilities to achieve shared goals.	4.01	0.86
	Encourage children to collaborate instead of compete.	4.31	0.75
	Encourage children to resolve conflicts independently during group activities.	4.00	0.90
	Ask open-ended questions to stimulate children's critical thinking.	4.30	0.79
	Praise children when they exhibit desirable behavior	4.50	0.73
	Share personal experiences related to the activities the children are doing	4.26	0.78
	Encourage children when they feel unsure of themselves	4.49	0.75
	Listen to children when they express their feelings, opinions, or share stories	4.47	0.74

Experience provision (Conclusion) Parent involvement	Model desired behaviors when expecting children to demonstrate them.	4.48	0.73
	Encourage children to summarize and share their learning experiences	4.25	0.79
	Encourage children to evaluate their own learning and that of their peers	4.01	0.84
	Encourage children to connect new knowledge with real-life situations	4.13	0.80
	Provide various communication channels to ensure convenience for all parents	4.21	0.82
	Share information and stories about the children with their parents	4.30	0.79
	Offer guidance to parents on supporting their child's learning at home	4.30	0.81
	Assign activities for parents to do with their children at home	4.11	0.89
	Consult with parents to identify solutions and support the child's development.	4.35	0.74

3.2.3 Approaches Employed by Administrators

The results indicate that in strategic planning, administrators most frequently establish a school development plan focused on promoting leadership characteristics and skills in young children ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.71$). The least frequent practice in this area is creating an annual action plan with a focus on fostering leadership characteristics and skills in young children, which is still considered acceptable ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.67$). The results show that administrators regularly create a curriculum and promote extracurricular activities that foster leadership in young children, both rated as acceptable ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.87$ and $M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.67$, respectively). The results also show that administrators excel in organizing learning experiences and environments. This includes encouraging teachers to organize learning experiences that develop leadership in young children ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.67$) and creating a supportive school atmosphere for teaching and learning to foster these skills ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.67$). However, encouraging and supporting teachers in using ICT tools to enhance leadership activities is less frequent ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.79$). In the area of professional development, administrators provide considerable encouragement and support for the exchange of best practices in teaching to develop leadership in young children ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.61$). However, recognizing and reinforcing teachers with outstanding performance in this area is less frequent ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.71$). The results further suggest that fostering cooperation with parents and external organizations is the area where administrators do the least to promote leadership development. Collaboration between the school and parents to develop leadership skills in young children is the most frequent practice in this category ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.85$), while collaboration between the school and external organizations to achieve the same goal is the least frequent ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.68$). Finally, monitoring and evaluating the teaching and learning of leadership activities ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.83$) and allocating a budget to support leadership teaching and learning activities ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.85$) are moderately consistent practices.

Table 4. Approaches to Promote Leadership in Young Children by Administrators

Areas	Approaches to promote leadership in young children by administrators	Mean	SD
Strategic Planning	Establish a philosophy, vision, and mission focused on developing leadership in young children.	4.26	0.71
	Create a development plan focused on promoting leadership in young children.	4.26	0.64
	Create an annual action plan focused on promoting leadership in young children.	4.16	0.67
Curriculum and extracurricular act.	Create a curriculum that fosters leadership in young children.	4.16	0.87
	Promote extracurricular activities that develop leadership in young children.	4.16	0.67
Learning Experiences and Environment	Survey teachers' needs when planning learning experiences to develop leadership in young children	4.05	0.69
	Provide opportunities for teachers to participate in planning learning experiences	4.32	0.65
	Encourage teachers to create leadership learning experiences	4.37	0.67
Learning Environment	Set up learning corners and materials that support leadership activities	4.11	0.72
	Encourage and support teachers in using ICT tools to enhance leadership activities	4.00	0.79
	Create a school environment that fosters leadership learning activities	4.37	0.67

Professional development for teachers	Promote and support the exchange of best practices in teaching methods	4.21	0.61
	Provide teachers with guidance on teaching methods	3.95	0.60
	Recognize and reward teachers who excel in developing leadership in young children.	3.74	0.71
School Collaboration	Foster collaboration between the school and parents	3.89	0.85
	Foster collaboration between schools	3.58	0.75
	Foster collaboration between schools and external organizations	3.47	0.68
Others	Monitor and evaluate the teaching and learning of leadership activities	4.05	0.83
	Allocate a budget to support leadership teaching and learning activities	4.11	0.85

4. Discussions

The purposes of this study are to identify and prioritize the leadership characteristics and skills that parents and teachers consider most in need of development and to investigate approaches for promoting leadership in early childhood through the perspectives of teachers, parents, and administrators. The important points are discussed in two parts.

4.1 Part One: Leadership Characteristics and Skills Prioritized Based on Parents' and Teachers' Needs

The ranking of leadership characteristics and skills by parents and teachers reveals several interesting insights. First, it was seen from the result that both parents and teachers considered communication, particularly listening to others without interrupting, as the top indicator of leadership behavior that needs to be cultivated. At home, parents may prioritize teaching their child to listen attentively to understand the needs of others. The ability to listen to others without interrupting is also important at school, as it is a crucial skill that helps children get along with others. This aligned with what Hailey and Fazio-Brunson (2020) stated in their research that the ability to listen and respond effectively topped the list in the execution of leadership. Moreover, children who possess leadership communication skills not only express themselves well but also demonstrate the ability to listen to their followers and make sound decisions based on their input (Sritip, 2017).

Second, parents and teachers demonstrate their unique perspectives on leadership characteristics and skills, highlighting the differing priorities shaped by their roles in a child's development. The result indicated that responsibility is the main leadership component ranked by parents. The four leadership responsibility indicators are accepting what one has done without blaming others, using natural resources efficiently for maximum benefit, controlling oneself to complete one's tasks successfully, and explaining the reasons and consequences of actions on others and the environment. It could mean that parents' primary goal for their children is to ensure they develop a sense of responsibility for themselves, as well as towards others and the environment, enabling them to live happily in society. This aligns with Hailey and Fazio-Brunson's (2020) view that responsibility is a key leadership behavior in young children, as they prioritize the group's needs over their own, demonstrate altruism, and seek solutions to support others facing challenges. On the contrary, decision-making appears five times in the rankings by teachers. The five decision-making indicators include setting their own goals and the goals of the group, adapting methods when facing obstacles and appropriately utilizes available resources in activities, comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the available options, anticipating the situation and the possible outcomes that may occur, and setting the choices, methods, and materials or equipment creatively to achieve goals. For teachers, children adopting these behaviors can lay the foundation for effective decision-making, fostering critical thinking, improving problem-solving skills, and building confidence in their judgment—essential for personal and academic growth. Moreover, these behavioral indicators encompass planning and problem-solving abilities, which are key components of the National Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, Thailand, 2017). The curriculum emphasizes that children need to develop fundamental thinking skills, including problem-solving, decision-making, and logical thinking, to support their basic learning.

Last, it is worth noting that different leadership components are absent from the rankings provided by parents and teachers. Collaboration does not appear in the top ten rankings by parents, possibly because children are less frequently participating in collaborative activities at home. This may be because most families have only one child (76%), leading to activities that involve solo play and provide limited opportunities for collaboration. However, research has suggested that through collaborative play, leadership and power negotiation could be both developed and sustained (Mawson, 2009). Meanwhile, responsibility does not appear in the top ten leadership indicators ranked by teachers. This may be because there are certain rules and agreements in school that children are required to follow. Children are expected to develop life skills that show responsibility before starting school. This is also reflected in the National Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, Thailand, 2017), which aims for

children to acquire life skills, practice the principles of a sufficiency economy, self-discipline, and other social values by a certain age. Additionally, teachers may have lower expectations of what children can or cannot do because they understand that children's abilities develop at different rates.

The results suggest that home activities should promote responsibility and collaboration between parents and children, addressing both prioritized and overlooked leadership indicators. Similarly, school activities should emphasize promoting decision-making and responsibility, aligning with teachers' priorities while addressing gaps. By integrating efforts from both home and school, a more comprehensive approach to nurturing leadership characteristics and skills in young children can be developed.

4.2 Part Two: The Current Approaches to Promote Leadership in Young Children by Parents, Teachers, and Administrators

4.2.1 Approaches Employed by Parents

It is evident that children often engage in play with their parents daily, typically spending an average of 30 to 40 minutes together. This time spent playing not only strengthens the bond between parents and children but also has a lasting impact on the child's development. Both attachment and play are essential experiences that can significantly influence an individual's leadership development throughout their life (Liu et al., 2021). By fostering these connections and creating opportunities for play, parents play a crucial role in nurturing the foundational skills that contribute to leadership growth in young children.

According to the results, one of the most frequent activities parents engage in with their children is reading books. Parents may prefer reading books with their children at home as it is a simple activity that requires minimal preparation, creates bonding between parents and children, and helps children calm down. Reading books facilitates meaningful conversations and interactions, fostering a stronger bond between parents and children (Canfield et al., 2020). This aligns with research by Epstein (1983), which highlights reading aloud or listening to a child read as one of the most common practices among parents to do at home. The next most frequent activity that parents engage in with their children is building blocks. This could be because block building activities offer opportunities for various forms of social interaction (Parten, 1933), allowing parents to engage with their children in a fun and interactive environment. The third most frequent activity parents engage in with their children is role play. This could be that role play allows parents to engage in playful and imaginative activities that can be both fun and entertaining. Parents can do role play using everyday items or no props at all, making it an easy and accessible activity to do at home. Moreover, role play enables children to imagine themselves in different roles, interact with others in conflict situations, analyze alternatives, seek solutions, and express ideas and emotions through role enactment. Consequently, it fosters greater awareness and sensitivity to the needs of others, promoting the development of both prosocial behavior and leadership skills (Mawson, 2011).

It is also seen from the results that the most frequent practice parents engage in developing leadership in children is praising children when they exhibit desirable behavior. This is supported by Henderlong Corpus and Lepper (2002) who stated that positive reinforcement is a widely recognized and effective parenting strategy for encouraging desired behaviors. Praising children for positive behaviors not only reinforces those behaviors but also boosts children's self-esteem and confidence, which are essential for leadership development. Praise helps children feel valued, promoting a sense of accomplishment and reinforcing their motivation to continue exhibiting positive behavior, including those related to leadership. It is also seen from the results that one of the least common practices among parents is planning play activities with their children to achieve specific goals. This may be because parents might see playtime as a spontaneous and flexible activity, focusing on enjoyment and natural interaction rather than following a strict plan. However, play activities that promote leadership, such as cooperative play, do require planning, as they encourage children to make decisions and communicate with others (UNICEF, 2018). Cooperative play allows the parent and child to demonstrate flexibility by adapting to each other's needs and adjusting their leadership and follower roles based on the context (Yarmolovsky & Geva, 2023). The results also show that parents are most involved with the school by completing teacher-assigned activities at home, but they less frequently engage in activities specifically aimed at developing leadership skills. This may be because parents are willing to engage in activities with their children but lack knowledge on how to foster leadership skills through them.

The findings suggest that activities assigned by teachers for parents to do at home with their children should focus on cooperative play, involving task delegation, planning, and working toward shared goals. Integrating these elements into activities can help nurture leadership characteristics and skills, such as decision-making, communication, and collaboration in young children. Moreover, since parents less frequently engage in activities specifically designed to promote leadership at home, schools can support them by providing ideas for home

learning (Epstein, 1983). This can include workshops led by teachers or administrators to share strategies and activities that foster leadership development.

4.2.2 Approaches Employed by Teachers

The findings indicate that the top three practices teachers engage in to promote leadership in young children are praising children when they exhibit desirable behavior, greeting every child warmly to make them feel welcomed and secure, and sharing information and stories about the children with their parents. These actions align with other research emphasizing the importance of positive communication, which aims to foster mutual understanding and satisfaction among all parties involved (Ahmed, 2019). According to Mirivel (2014), greeting to establish connection, complimenting to support self-development, and sharing information to deepen relationships are among the seven positive communication behaviors. When teachers use these techniques, they foster meaningful and positive relationships with children. This approach is in line with Kolucki and Lemish's (2011) belief that communication with children should be positive and strengths-based, focusing on each child's strengths and potential rather than their deficits or problems. This method aims not only to educate but also to foster resilience and build children's capacity to cope with challenges, thereby developing self-confidence—an essential component of leadership in young children.

The results also indicate that teachers less frequently encourage children to resolve conflicts independently during group activities, possibly due to concerns about the children's developmental readiness and the potential for conflicts to escalate without guidance. Research by Fox et al. (2015) supports this, suggesting that teachers are more likely to intervene during large group play, as children in larger groups often exhibit more aggressive behavior, leading to conflicts. It is also seen from the result that teachers less frequently allow children to assess their own learning and that of their peers. This could be that teachers may question students' capacity to provide constructive and objective evaluations. The lack of emphasis on self-reflection could hinder children's development of self-awareness, which is essential for building self-confidence, a key component of leadership (Karagianni & Montgomery, 2017).

Therefore, teachers should allow time for children to work through conflicts on their own and encourage them to regularly reflect on what they have learned and achieved, as this helps build their leadership skills. Mawson (2011) also suggested that teachers delay their interventions to give children the chance to develop conflict resolution skills independently, particularly in larger groups.

4.2.3 Approaches Employed by Administrators

It is seen from the result that most administrators encourage their teachers to organize learning experiences and create a school atmosphere to develop leadership characteristics and skills in young children. These findings support the claims that leadership potential exists in every child and can be enhanced through education and practice (Bisland, 2004; Shin et al. 2004; Zembat et al., 2017; Ruoran et al., 2023). The results also suggest that administrators least frequently reward teachers who demonstrate outstanding performance in developing leadership skills in young children. This could be due to administrators not fully recognizing the importance of fostering leadership in early childhood or perhaps due to a tendency among administrators to overlook individual contributions in general. However, as Xu (2023) noted, principals, as key leaders, greatly influence kindergarten organization and teacher innovation. When teachers receive strong innovation support from their leaders, they develop a greater sense of responsibility toward the organization. Moreover, it was also seen from the results that fostering cooperation with parents and other organizations is the lowest area that administrators have done to promote leadership in young children. This could be because building strong partnerships with parents and external organizations requires dedicated time, personnel, and resources, which schools may lack due to tight budgets and schedules. This is also supported by the work from Epstein (2002) which stated that while some schools may recognize the importance of family-school-community partnerships, many schools face challenges in implementing systematic collaboration strategies.

As a result, administrators should reward teachers who excel in developing leadership skills in young children through various methods, such as public recognition in meetings or newsletters, offering professional development opportunities, providing financial incentives, and collecting positive feedback from parents and colleagues. These rewards motivate teachers to continue fostering leadership skills in students and reinforce the importance of their contributions to children's development. To foster collaboration, schools can implement strategies that strengthen connections with other schools, families, and external organizations. For example, schools can organize joint leadership training programs, inter-school projects, and share resources to enhance teacher development and children's experiences. Schools can also offer parent workshops, maintain regular communication, and involve parents in decision-making, while providing tips on promoting leadership in young children. Additionally,

partnering with external organizations can provide resources and expertise to support child development and leadership. These efforts create a holistic, cooperative environment that benefits children, families, and the wider community.

5. Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it was conducted in kindergartens under the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC) in Bangkok, which may not fully reflect the broader population. Although a stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure proportional representation across different geographic regions within Bangkok, the socio-cultural and educational context of the capital may differ significantly from that of other provinces. Furthermore, parents of children in public kindergartens may have fewer resources or less time to actively engage in leadership development activities compared to those in private kindergartens, potentially influencing the extent of parental involvement in fostering leadership characteristics and skills. Expanding the research to include public kindergartens would offer relevant stakeholders, such as administrators and policymakers, a more comprehensive perspective by accounting for variations in regulations, institutional structures, and contextual factors.

6. Conclusion

This research has provided new insights into how parents and teachers perceive leadership in young children and what approaches related stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators do to promote it. Both parents and teachers place a strong emphasis on communication, particularly highlighting the importance of listening to others without interruption as the most essential leadership behavior to develop. While parents prioritized responsibility, ranking it four times within the top ten, teachers placed greater focus on decision-making. Furthermore, collaboration, which is a key leadership characteristic and skill, is notably absent from the top rankings identified by parents. Conversely, responsibility is absent from the teachers' rankings.

The research also concluded that the approach fostering leadership in early childhood varies based on the roles parents, teachers, and administrators play in children's lives. Parents frequently participate in daily play activities with their children, typically dedicating 30 to 40 minutes per day. The most common activities parents engage in with their children are reading books, building blocks, and role-playing. Parents' practices in promoting leadership while playing with their children include praising desirable behavior. However, they less frequently plan activities with children to achieve desired goals. Regarding school involvement, parents predominantly participate in teacher-assigned activities with their children at home but less frequently engage in activities that explicitly promote leadership skills and characteristics. As for teachers, they primarily use positive communication strategies to promote leadership in children. This includes praising children for desirable behaviors, greeting them warmly to make them feel welcomed and secure, and sharing information about the children with their parents. However, the least common practices involve encouraging children to resolve conflicts independently during group activities and allowing them to assess their own learning as well as that of their peers. For administrators, while they already encourage teachers to organize learning experiences and create a school environment that fosters the development of leadership characteristics and skills in young children, they least frequently reward teachers who demonstrate outstanding performance in this area. Additionally, fostering cooperation with parents and other organizations is the least common effort administrators make to promote leadership in young children.

In conclusion, understanding how parents and teachers perceive leadership in young children is valuable for identifying what they consider essential for fostering those characteristics and skills. This insight also helps guide the design of activities that focus on promoting specific leadership characteristics and skills in young children. Furthermore, understanding the practices employed by key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators, in promoting leadership in young children is crucial for designing tailored leadership development programs or activities that are appropriate for each group.

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Authors contributions

In this study, Dr. Piyanan Hirunchalothorn, Dr. Pattamavadi Lehmongkol, and Dr. Thananun Thanarachatapoom supervised the study design and revision process, ensuring methodological rigor. They provided valuable insights and supervised data collection and analysis. There were no special authorship agreements, and all authors participated in reviewing and approving the final version.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Kasetsart University Research Ethics Committee (COA67/031, dated 27 May 2024).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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